[From THE CAMBRIDGE TRIBUNE, October 21, 1911.]

CAMBRIDGE IN 1761

Address of Richard Henry Dana at Celebration of 150th Anniversary of Christ Church, in Sanders Theatre, October 16, 1911.

Richard H. Dana spoke as follows:

To appreciate the conditions in Cambridge one must look beyond the little village of about 1,500 inhabitants in 1761. The French Colonial War had been brought to an end, though the peace of Fontainebleau was not signed till a year later; Fort De Quesne, now Detroit, had been taken by Forbes in 1758; Johnson had taken Fort Niagara in 1759; Amherst had captured Ticonderoga and Crown Point that same summer; Quebec had been taken in the following September, and Montreal had surrendered to Amherst just about a year after that; George, the Second, had died almost exactly a year before the opening of Christ Church, and George, the Third, had ascended the throne; many of the West India Islands belonging to the French had been captured, and this opened up an opportunity to our colonists of larger trading with these islands than ever before.

During a half century, more or less of this trade had been carried on, notwithstanding restrictions imposed by parliament, and Boston merchants used to bribe the customs officers to wink at evasions of these restrictions.

George, the Third, and his minister, Grenville, decided to enforce these restrictive laws, however, and a special British commissioner of customs had been sent out to Boston and he had appealed to the courts for writs of assistance. These writs were search warrants, as you all know, good for an indefinite period, not returnable to any court, and authorized indefinite search of an indefinite number of houses—business or dwelling. The resistance against these writs had already begun to break out and to interfere with the good feeling which had existed between the colonies and the mother country during the wars against the French, in which mother country and colonies had joined hand in hand, and during which period the colonies had been left much to their own devices. Some citizens of Cambridge were among the leaders in the remonstrances. It was this very year that James Otis, of Boston, in his argument against the issuance of these

journals written in 1778, speaking of these houses, said: "We remained three weeks at this place until they transferred us to Cambridge, where they lodged us in one of the most delightful houses of the place which had formerly been built by the wealth of the Royalists. Never had I chanced upon such an agreeable situation. Seven families who were connected with each other, partly by the ties of relationship and partly by affection, had here farms, gardens, and magnificent houses, and not far off plantations of fruit. The owners of these were in the habit of daily meeting each other in the afternoon, now at the house of one, and now at another, and making themselves merry with music and dance—living in prosperity, united and happy, until alas! this ruinous war severed them and left all their houses desolate except two, the proprietors of which were also soon obliged to flee." The Cambridge Press, then under Samuel Green, was the best in the colonies.

On the site of Christ Church was formerly the village pound. The common, which was opposite the church, by this time cut down to its present size, was owned by common proprietors who pastured their cows on alloted portions. It was only later that it was transferred to the town of Cambridge as a training ground.

It is delightful to think of the simple life of the pious inhabitants of this place in those days. With the exception of certain newcomers, rich folk who had made their fortunes in the West Indies and were among the founders of Christ Church, they were almost to a man descendants of the early English settlers, but they had their defects, moral, mental, and physical. Judging from the diaries and letters, there was much dyspepsia and general ill health. Drunkenness was far too common, and a man was not ostracized from good society for becoming intoxicated at the end of a dinner. Smallpox, fatal throat trouble, as it was then called (doubtless diphtheria), and what we now call typhoid fever were prevalent. A most serious scourge of the smallpox occurred three years after the time which we now celebrate. Besides the bribery of certain custom house officers not to enforce unpopular laws, we find from the records that the selectmen of Cambridge were not averse to junketing at the town's expense, and in other colonies, both French and English, we find proved instances of public dishonesty, enough to show us that the times were not wholly ideal.

The dressing in those days was elaborate. Colored or white stockings, short clothes, and long coats with gilt buttons for the men, and silks, satins, brocades of varied and bright colors, powdered hair for both sexes, were the rule with the well-to-do. This seems very extravagant, but, on the other hand, the fashions did not often change and the more handsome clothes were even passed from one generation to another.

The roads were execrable. There was always dust or mud and worse than in New England generally on account of the nature of the soil and lack of good binding gravel at hand. It must have taken a good hour and a half to drive the eight miles from Harvard square by way of the "Great Bridge," Roxbury and the Neck to Boston. The contrast of those days with Cambridge of today, or what it is soon to be with its eight minutes in the subway, from Harvard square to Park street, Boston, with the new Memorial Bridge about to be built to the Stadium, with our coal, modern heating apparatus, gas, electric light, ice in summer, tropical fruits in winter, water supply and sewage system, our nearly complete freedom from most of the old epidemics and a better general health, access to libraries and art galleries, and our greater freedom of thought, may make us fairly contented with our present lot, however much we may envy the simplicity and sturdiness of the old days.